

well. He is literally allowed no voice, a truth chillingly depicted in a scene where he is tortured with a cattle prod for uttering a single word. The figure that seems to signal baby's entry into the adult world of speech has her own agenda, and her own desire. Everything else is just facade: her choice of profession says it all—she is a social “worker.”

The baby of *The Baby* is a perennial baby. As the hero of the film, he becomes our role model prompting an identification, of course, which is too painful to maintain. We are forced, rather, into the position of the bad mother. Either way, it's a no-win situation: the regression at stake here is not back to an idealized childhood or to some sexy never-never land of female bounty, and there are no heroes to emulate and no morals to be learned. The only escape route is into black humor.

Baby Huey is a classic example of sublimated regression, which is not only filtered through the form of comedy but in this case through animation as well.⁸ Made at a time when cartoons were still designed for a general audience, adults as well as children, Baby Huey cartoons were made for theatrical release. Famous Studios, which produced Baby Huey as well as Casper the Friendly Ghost and Little Audrey, is credited with being the first studio to gear their cartoons specifically to very young children.⁹ Today, when cartoons are relegated to Saturday morning television, this is one thing. But back in the 1950s, it was quite another situation, as the entire adult portion of a movie-going audience was forced to sit through these infantile productions. Combined with their production-line mode of creation (if a visual gag provoked laughter in three test screenings, it was put in every cartoon from then on)¹⁰—this is one reason historians of animation generally despise these cartoons. They signal the end of serious animation and the rise of kid vid.

Even for the child audience, Baby Huey is a baby, posed in a lower strata and clearly more inept than the young viewers themselves. For the child there must be a perverse pleasure in seeing the normal family hierarchy reversed. By virtue of its size and strength, the baby lords over the pip-squeak adults. The cartoons are funny because, despite Baby Huey's ineptitude, the adults are even more inept. Baby Huey is an uncontrollable force undaunted by the world's problems. However, for the adult viewer forced to sit through them, these cartoons are something else. It is hard to find anything pleasurable in them. Baby Huey's innocent triumph over mean friends, inattentive parents, and a pedophile fox can only be enjoyed by regression to a childhood that consists only of pain. While the child viewer might see these cartoons as a playful transcendence, the adult can experience them only as a painful reversion. Baby Huey cartoons might be entertainment to the child, but they become art to the adult forced to sit through them. Otherwise they are unendurable.